

News Release

Senator Pete V. Domenici

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DOMENICI SEEKS ADDITIONAL \$250,000 TO ADDRESS BOSQUE FIRES

Senator Also Seeks Support for Endangered Species Recovery

WASHINGTON -- In order to address recent fires that blazed through the Rio Grande bosque this year, Senator Pete Domenici today reported he is seeking an additional \$250,000 in federal funding to support the preservation and study of the unique river habitat.

Domenici, a Senate Appropriations Committee member, is working to include the funding in the FY 2001 Interior Appropriations Bill that the Senate and House will develop this summer. The funding would be used to continue the Middle Rio Grande Research initiative, which aims to regenerate the bosque that stretches along the Rio Grande and supports large numbers of migratory birds and endangered species.

In April, Domenici requested \$550,000 to support the program. But the Senator retooled his request to address the fires, bringing his total request for the project to \$800,000 for FY 2001. Almost a decade ago, Domenici was instrumental in launching the initiative to study, promote and preserve the bosque.

"The recent fires that raged through the bosque harmed and destroyed important areas of the bosque habitat along the Middle Rio Grande," Domenici said. "I am requesting this additional funding to continue the bosque ecosystem monitoring program and work associated with the April fire. This program, which we launched almost a decade ago, is working to help reverse the decline of the bosque and regenerate its unique habitat for the betterment of the wildlife it sustains."

Domenici said the Fish and Wildlife Service has made significant progress in collecting data on the bosque, and is working with state and local officials to implement a biological management plan. The president's FY 2001 budget requested \$550,000 for the bosque.

Domenici said he is also seeking \$150,000 to support the Fish and Wildlife Service's involvement in a coordinated effort underway to develop a plan to address the listing of the silvery minnow as a threatened and endangered species in the Middle Rio Grande.

These funds would be used for a Coordinator for the Middle Rio Grande

Endangered Species Collaboration program and for facilitation activities with the other participants from other federal agencies, as well as state and local partners.

“With the designation of critical habitat last year, numerous stakeholders have come together to work in a coordinated fashion to address the silvery minnow issues,” Domenici said. “This funding will help local, state and federal planners come together to address endangered species challenges.”

Domenici said he is also requesting \$250,000 for the Fish and Wildlife Service under Section 666 of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act for work to be undertaken as identified by the Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Act (ESA) work group for Rio Grande silvery minnow recovery purposes.

Matching funds will be provided by the state of New Mexico or the Middle Rio Grande water users. These funds will allow the implementation of priority tasks identified with recovery plan activities specifically for the Rio Grande silver minnow.

Domenici said the above bosque preservation initiatives are result of recommendations made by the Rio Grande Bosque Conservation Committee the lawmaker formed in September 1991 to outline steps to protect the endangered bosque habitat along the Rio Grande.

The recommendations were made after 16 months of research and public meetings conducted by the committee. The committee's advice centered around a goal of organizing local, state and federal resources in a coordinated effort to preserve the ancient cottonwood riparian areas along a 150-mile stretch between Cochiti Lake and the head of the Elephant Butte Reservoir.

The committee issued its recommendations based on information gathered from public meetings with citizens, the pueblos, scientists, and government agencies with management jurisdiction over the bosque.

The Rio Grande Bosque is the oldest continuously inhabited region in the United States, and possesses the finest remaining example of cottonwood forest in the Southwest. It provides water for more than 100,000 people and nearly 90,000 acres of irrigated lands. Six pueblos are located in portions of the bosque, which is also a critical flyway and wintering ground for migrating birds.

The requests are only the first step in the appropriations process. The Senate and House will aim to complete all 13 of the FY2001 appropriations bills to fund the federal government by the Oct. 1 start of the 2001 fiscal year.

